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From Mrs. Helena

On Going to the Father.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

WALLINGFORD, JULY 11, 1849,

AT THE FUNERAL OF

DORCAS SOUTHMAYD GILBERT,

WIFE OF

REV. EDWIN R. GILBERT,

AND DAUGHTER OF

REV. AARON AND MRS. DORCAS DUTTON.

BY LEVERETT GRIGGS,

PASTOR OF THE SECOND CHURCH IN MILBURY, MASS.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

HARTFORD:

PRESS OF CASE, TIFFANY AND COMPANY.

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ON GOING TO THE FATHER.

JOHN, 16: 16.—“A LITTLE WHILE AND YE SHALL NOT SEE ME; AGAIN A LITTLE WHILE AND YE SHALL SEE ME, BECAUSE I GO TO THE FATHER.”

WHEN our Saviour spoke these words to his disciples they did not understand him, but inquired among themselves about his meaning. Observing their difficulty and their desire for information, Christ resumed the subject and explained it more fully. He gave his disciples to understand that he was about to leave them,—that the world would be in triumph, and they sad; but he assured them that their sorrow should be turned into joy. He then instructed them how they were to obtain consolation and support by praying to the Father in his name. Special pains are taken to turn the attention of the disciples to the Father, and to teach them how they may obtain all needful blessings by approaching him in the name of his beloved Son. It would seem that they had been accustomed to address their supplications to the Redeemer alone; but he would show them the way to the Father also. “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full.” And the more effectually

to acquaint them with the Father, and encourage them to approach him, the Saviour adds—"At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you. For the Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." In other words—"I wish you, my dear followers, to believe that your heavenly Father hath a deep interest in you, and will grant you the richest blessings of his Kingdom, if you supplicate them in my name. All this he feels: all this he will do for you on account of your attachment to me." His remarks on this part of the subject then close with these words—"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and go to the Father."

Notwithstanding this explanation of our Lord, there are different opinions among his disciples still, concerning the import of the text—"A little while and ye shall not see me: again a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father."

It is asked whether this does not refer to his death and burial, which were about to take place, and by which he would for a little time be removed from their sight, and then again restored to them. Christ's death was indeed near at hand. On the next day he was apprehended, crucified and slain. He was laid in the grave, from which he rose again after three days, and was seen by his disciples. This may have been referred to in the language of the text. But something more also seems to be intended in order to give pertinency and force to the last clause of the the text—"Be-

cause I go to the Father." Our Saviour could not thus have referred to his *ascension* as a reason why they should see him before it, after his resurrection. Had he intended merely to teach the necessity of his resurrection in order to his ascension, and to assure his disciples that they should see him once more before he left the world, it is manifest that he would have chosen some other method of communicating this truth.

It has been thought by some that when the Saviour said—"Again a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father;" his disciples understood him as referring to his speedy second coming, when he would establish his personal reign in the sight of all people. With regard to this view of the subject, I would remark, that there is nothing in the language to warrant the idea that any allusion whatever was made to Christ's personal reign. Moreover, he had explicitly taught them in other places not to expect such a reign—that his *kingdom is not of this world*.

When the disciples are assured that they shall again see their Lord in a little while, many have supposed that reference is made to the clear spiritual vision which they would obtain of him by the aid of the Holy Spirit. Much indeed is said about this in the chapter that contains the text. The disciples are encouraged to pray the Father in the name of Christ for the richest blessings they can desire. "Ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full." The Saviour promised to be with his disciples to the end of the world; to manifest himself unto them; to take up his abode with them;

and they are said to behold his glory. There is much indeed to warrant the interpretation we are now considering. It is a far less objectionable view of the passage, than the others to which we have alluded. In fact, on reading the whole chapter, we feel but little objection to this interpretation. Still it does not seem freely to express the sense the Saviour intended, and which is required by other portions of Scripture. When any thing is said about seeing Christ, reference is generally, if not uniformly, made to the vision which his followers will enjoy of him in the heavenly State. They are represented as walking by *faith*, and not by sight, while in this State of probation. “In whom, though now they *see him not*, yet believing, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” One of the principal points of difference between the heavenly and the earthly condition of believers is, according to the Scriptures, the clear and beatific vision which they will have of Jesus in their glorified State. Says the apostle John—“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that when he appeareth we shall be like him, for we *shall see him as he is*.” And this view of Christ is the privilege which he prays the Father his disciples may enjoy in the future state : “Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they *may behold my glory*, even the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”

To see Christ and behold his glory then, in its highest sense, is not the privilege of Christians here, but is reserved for them in that better coun-

try to which they go. Here they look through a glass darkly : but as soon as they pass off from these shores of time, they are with the Lord, and see face to face. This is the vision to which I suppose the Saviour referred when he said—"A little while and ye shall not see me : again a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father." As much as to say—"I shall soon leave you and ascend to the Father ; we shall be separated for a little while—a little while you will not see me : but soon your course will be ended, and then you shall be with me in paradise ; and when you meet me there, it will be to remain forever with the Lord :'" "Again a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father." Such seems to be the real import of the text when we consider the occasion on which it was uttered, the last clause of the text, and other kindred passages whose meaning is clear.

As it is the privilege of those who die in the Lord to go immediately to the Father, the words of our text may be properly considered as addressed by them to afflicted friends who still linger in this vale of tears, but will soon join them in that better country where separation and sorrow are not known.

Some things are implied in going to the Father which it may be pleasant and profitable to contemplate for a few moments.

When one goes to the Father, his mission here on earth is closed. It was thus with Christ. He was sent into our world on a most important mission ;—it was to instruct men in the will of God, to exhibit a pattern of true religion, and finally to die on the cross, that the world through him might be saved.

When the time of his return to the Father came, all this work was accomplished. He had taught men how to live both by precept and example ;— he had taken the bitter cup and tasted death for every man ;—the great object of his mission was accomplished, and he was ready to return to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God. Every human being is sent into the world on an important errand. Even the little child that does but touch on these shores of time, does not touch in vain. Though he may not enter on the stage of probation as a moral being, he is made, as we firmly believe, a partaker of the blessings of redemption. Not only so, but in many cases, the little unconscious messenger is employed as the evening zephyr to wake up some dull harp to heavenly music that might otherwise remain mute forever.

Many parents have been savingly benefitted by the early death of their children. They were thus taught the vanity of earthly good and led to seek a better portion, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not. Every one is sent into the world on an important mission. I am aware that many seem not to know the great end of life. They live for themselves ; to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. They defeat the grand object of their existence by refusing to be wise. But though they prove unfaithful to their trust, their mission soon closes: “ The dust returns to the earth as it was ; and the Spirit unto God who gave it.”

The Christian is the only one that is mindful of his appropriate work. His mission is, in many respects, like that of his Lord. In his prayer for his disciples Christ says to the Father—“ As thou hast

sent me into the world, even so have I sent them into the world." Like the Saviour the Christian has much to do and much to suffer. Though he can make no atonement for sin, he must live to do good and bless his fellow men. All the precious talents committed to him are to be consecrated to the glory of God, and the salvation of the world. The condition of his being in this world renders his life one of toil, suffering and sorrow. But when he goes to the Father, his mission here, as a subject of probation, is at an end. He *may* still often return to these shores on errands of love, one of those ministering Spirits that are sent to minister to the heirs of salvation. However this may be, he is no longer a weary pilgrim burdened with the cares, temptations and sins of earth. In this vale of tears he dwells no more, sighing forth—"O that I had wings like a dove that I might fly away and be at rest." The troubled sea of life with all its storms he leaves behind. He is no longer tossed upon its raging billows, nor is he pained, as he once was, with a sight of the wrecks that cover its bosom :

" But he is gone where grief will not devour,
Where beauty will not fade, and skies will never lower."

He that goes to the Father has a character meet for heaven. The Saviour who uttered the language of the text concerning himself, was "the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person." He did not leave the heavenly world, as the fallen angels did, because he was unworthy to remain there. When he made himself of no

reputation, and took on him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men, and humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, then he was in the form of God and thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Hence the greatness of the sacrifice on the part of the Father. To take his fellow, his equal, his only begotten and well-beloved Son and lay on him the iniquity of us all—this was an act of self-denial without a parallel in the universe. God indeed is love, and Christ is infinitely lovely. And when he had finished his mission, and went to the Father, he was received with great joy. The shining host above shouted—"Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the king of glory shall come in." Christ is the embodiment of purity, love and holiness, yea, of every perfection of the Godhead. And his disciples who go to the Father possess his spirit and bear his image. This is according to the requirement of God: "Be ye holy for I am holy." Again, it is written that this character is indispensably necessary in order to go to the Father: "*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*" It is expressly declared that no unclean thing shall ever enter the heavenly world. The character that is admitted there is such as is made meet for it. Of the ransomed throng above, it is said they are such as have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is delightful to contemplate such a character, and reflect that it is not only pure, but incorruptible and unchangeable. Christ says con-

cerning every one that goes to the Father—"He that is holy let him be holy still."

It is scarcely necessary to add that he who goes to the Father enters upon a blissful state. When Christ descended to earth he laid aside the glory which he before enjoyed; but when he finished his mission he went to be reinstated in that glory which he had with the Father before the world was. His disciples the Redeemer receives to a participation with himself in all the joys and possessions of the heavenly state: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things." Again; "He that overcometh shall sit down with me in my throne, even as I overcame and am sit down with my Father in his throne."

The Scriptures employ a great variety of strong figurative language to exalt our conceptions of the dignity, grandeur and happiness of heaven. But while here in the body our conceptions of future glory are necessarily faint and imperfect. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he appeareth, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is." This is enough, and we may confidently say with the Psalmist—"I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness."

He that goes to the Father will soon meet all his Christian friends.

Though the Scriptures shed but a glimmering light upon this point, we may confidently infer from the benevolence of Christ that his disciples who were associated together in the joys and trials of earth, will recognize each other on the heavenly plains. He is willing to gratify every desire of the sanctified soul:—"He is able to do for us exceed-

ing abundantly above all that we can ask or even think." Try then the question about future recognition by the question whether it is desirable. Will it heighten the bliss of heaven? If so, we may be sure that Christian friends will know each other in that bright world, and enjoy each other's society forever.

The glory of God, too, seems to require it. This will be displayed not only by the review which each one is permitted to make of God's dealings with him in his independent history, but in all the associations of life. And as each Christian is linked in duty and destiny in this state of trial with many others, we see how the glory of God may be promoted by their united praises, as He throws a flood of light on the dark points of their common history. Husbands and wives, whole families and churches, will need to turn over the leaves of God's providence together, that they may read what was illegible to them while here on earth. In this way they will be prepared to accumulate the revenue of glory due to the Holy One.

In view of our subject I am led to remark, in the first place, that we should be thankful for death.

Life indeed is sweet, and but few are willing to have it terminate. Some, I know, are so oppressed with its burdens that they sigh for release; but when death comes, they more generally prefer, like the man in the fable, to resume their burdens, rather than hear the summons to depart. There are so many blessings to be enjoyed here that it is infinitely desirable to the enemies of God, to have their existence on earth prolonged. If death overtakes

them in their sins, they pass from a state of mixed happiness to one of unmixed misery. Instead therefore of welcoming this messenger, they may well pray that he would keep forever distant. But continued sin is not a necessary condition of our existence. There is a way in which our reconciliation with God may be effected, so that we may find it gain to die. And as death is the appointed means of removing Christians from earth to heaven, we should be thankful for it. "It is the will of God and nature," says Franklin, "that these mortal bodies be laid aside, when the soul is to enter into real life. This is rather an embryo state, a preparation for living. A man is not completely born until he be dead. That bodies should be lent us, while they can afford us pleasure, assist us in acquiring knowledge, or doing good to our fellow creatures, is a kind and benevolent act of God. When they become unfit for these purposes, and afford us pain instead of pleasure, instead of an aid, become an incumbrance, and answer none of the intentions for which they were given, it is equally kind and benevolent that a way is provided by which we may get rid of them. Death is that way." Cannot every child of God, then, say with holy Job—"I would not live alway?" As we read the history of those who lived before the flood, what Christian is there that envies them their long period of probation? We soon lose our relish of earthly joys;—we soon pass beyond the bounds of our usefulness: and why should we desire to dwell forever in this land where we are exposed to temptation and many spiritual foes; where the storms of life buffet us;

and where toil, pain, disappointment and sorrow are the inevitable lot of all? The Christian has before him another and a better country, even an heavenly; and he should be thankful to that messenger that calls him to it.

The theme of our meditations affords consolation to all such as mourn the loss of friends who have died in the Lord.

Most of us, in some period of our history, have been called to drink of the bitter cup of affliction. Friends that were dear to us, and dear also to Christ have been taken from our sight into the presence of the Lord, from this vale of tears into that world where no tears are shed. In the case of some, their sun went down at noon, and we have occasion to weep for ourselves and for our children. Others retired to rest after the labors of a long and wearisome day. They are all together before the throne of God and the Lamb. Their mission is ended; they had characters meet for the heavenly state; they have entered on a blissful immortality; and they await the coming of all their pious friends to join them in that better world. For a little while we shall not see them: but if we love the Lord whom they loved; if we are devoted to the service of Him whom they served; if we are faithful unto death, it is but a *little while* and we shall meet our pious departed friends again: for we too *shall go to the Father*, and we and they shall be forever with the Lord.

In the language of the distinguished sage already referred to, we can say—"Our friends and we are invited abroad on a party of pleasure, which is to

last forever. Their chair was ready first; and they are gone before us. We could not all conveniently start together; and why should you and I be grieved at this, since we are soon to follow, and know where to find them?"

Thoughts like these shed a pleasing light upon the darkness of the tomb and the world that lies beyond: they span the heavens with a bow of hope and promise; but the very appearance of its gorgeous colors indicates that the orb of day is declining and the shadows of earth are thickening. When our friends die in the Lord, it gives us pleasure to think of their bodies at rest, and their spirits passed to a world of purity and peace. It gives us pleasure to think that this great change has been ordained in the wisdom and love of Him who doeth all things well; and with joy we anticipate the period when we too shall be called to join them in our Father's house, where are many mansions. But all this does not dry up the fountain of our present sorrow, or take from our burden its crushing weight. In our bereavment, we feel more deeply than ever that we live in a "vale of tears"—that we are strangers and pilgrims here on earth. And though we have a hope for the future that is an anchor to our souls sure and steadfast, we are not insensible to the storm that now beats upon us.

Our deeply afflicted brother, who has been called again, in the holy, wise but mysterious providence of God to part with a beloved wife, can rejoice in the Lord and rejoice always. The consolations of God, which he has so often imparted to others, will not be small with him. He will have adoring

views of divine sovereignty, and be willing that God should sit upon the throne and do all his pleasure. Repeated afflictions will not alienate him from his Father in heaven, nor diminish his confidence; but on the other hand, I doubt not, he can say, with a sincere heart, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him." He can rejoice in the thought that it is well with his beloved; that her condition is infinitely more desirable than in the days of her health and her highest happiness here, and that after "a little while" he too may "go to the Father." But at present he must be in heaviness through manifold trials. In being thus bereaved again, his children are left motherless, he is deprived of the society of his nearest and dearest earthly friend, and the light of his dwelling is turned into the gloom of a sepulchre. Already he may have said,

"But she is absent! she who was to me
The light and music of my happy home.
It was her smile which made this house so gay;
Her voice that made it eloquent with joy,
Her presence peopled it. Her very tread
Had life and gladness in it. But 'tis gone!
And silence fills her place, and solitude
Spreads like a shadow o'er the very walls!
And not a place, chair, book, is what it was,
A moment since, when she my love was here."

My dear brother, we have come together to-day, not to instruct you; but to express our sympathy and commend you to God and the word of his grace. We indeed, have been in the school of affliction, and have learned some things that we hope have not been in vain. But these are not new to you; you entered the school before some of us, and have received lessons both earlier and later, and

more often repeated. You know the magnitude of of your loss, and the depth of your sorrow better than any others. You also know the way to the mercy seat of Him who can "be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Often have you directed others thither: often have you been there yourself; and can you not adopt the language of the Psalmist, "I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." (Ps. 116: 1, 2.) We sympathize with you deeply, because we are sensible that your affliction is great. Eight and a half years since you buried an excellent wife, and for a time, it seemed as though you would be overwhelmed; but you was comforted and sustained by Him who hath promised—"When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee." In due time you was guided to the choice of another, who was admirably fitted to become your partner and stand at the head of your house. Her salutary influence was soon witnessed in the reviving of your spirits and in the fresh life and vigor that characterized your labors. She was the daughter of one who ruled well his own house, and took care of the church of of God in one place for thirty-six years with distinguished ability, fidelity and success. She had a mother of sound discretion, great energy of character, a high degree of intelligence and consistent piety. These parents, now "passed into the skies," lived to do good, and they trained their children

for this noble purpose.* Their daughter, whose remains are before us, became a hopeful subject of renewing grace at the age of sixteen, when a member of the Rev. Mr. Herrick's school in New Haven. She boarded in a pious family where she enjoyed the friendly and faithful counsels of a young lady who was declining under the same fatal disease that has now terminated her useful life. Many cords of love were entwined around her to draw her to Christ. The sweet and heavenly influence that pervaded the school-room and her temporary home, and the well known desires and prayers that followed her from the parental roof, were means well fitted to induce her by the blessing of God, to choose that good part which shall never be taken from her. The following year (1827) she made a public profession of religion in her native place—a profession which she has always adorned with a calm, serious and constant devotion to the service of Christ. Having enjoyed superior privileges, not only in the school referred to, but particularly at home for many years, and having become familiar with the cares and responsibilities of one at the head of a minister's family, she seemed to be qualified by Providence in a special manner for the station she came to fill about seven years since. In this new sphere of usefulness she has performed well her part. She has been a devoted wife and

* Mrs. Gilbert was born in Guilford, Ct., in 1810, the daughter of Rev. Aaron and Mrs. Dorcas Dutton. Her mother deceased in 1841. She was married to Rev. E. R. Gilbert in the ensuing summer. Her father, who with great grief had seen her fading away under the power of fatal disease, and expected to be a mourner at her grave, was called to his own grave quite suddenly a few weeks before her death.

mother ; and her influence, exerted in a quiet and unostentatious way, has gone forth like the gentle dew and the quickening beams of light. You have seen this, my dear brother, and have rejoiced. But for many months past you have had reason to fear that your dwelling was again to be darkened. In the incipient stages of her flattering and delusive disease, you was filled with alternate hope and fear. At length, the unwelcome thought became a moral certainty that your beloved wife must die. Gradually did she waste away, till at last her spirit was released, and the mortal tenement clothed in the habiliments of death. Life was sweet to her, and gladly would she have remained, if she might have been the means of happiness and usefulness to others. But she preferred to depart, rather than linger along in a comfortless state, without any prospect of recovery. She is gone, and she will return to her house no more.* We wonder not my dear brother, that you feel deeply afflicted, and sometimes have fears that this may be your ‘final breaking up, in almost every way.’ Be not discouraged, and suffer not your heart to faint in the day of trial. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He *will sustain thee.*” You have his word

* Though her affections, which were peculiarly tender and strong, caused her to cling to her friends, and to desire to remain with them, yet when it was manifestly God’s will that she should die, she yielded with cheerful resignation. The comforts and consolations of the religion she had exemplified in health sustained and cheered her during her protracted and trying sickness. She had the near and friendly presence of her Saviour, especially during her last weeks and days on earth ; and her soul, according to her own expression, was “more than peaceful.”

which can never fail. When you was called to bury your first wife, and three of your dear children, God was with you; and his promise is—"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come unto you." "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee."

There are others present who feel that the hand of God is laid heavily upon them in this dispensation. You and your brothers far away have lost a sister that was full of love toward you and much beloved by you. Lost did I say? O, no. She has gone to her heavenly home only a little before you. She is with those honored parents above; and there you will soon find her and them more pure and more lovely than they ever were in this sinful world. You look back to the days of your childhood, when your family circle was entire, when parents and children were rejoicing in each others smiles, and it seems but as yesterday. Now how many of them are removed to the world of spirits!*

And when a few more days are fled, death will darken your dwellings, and the sun will shine upon your graves. The beloved sister, now deceased, seems to say—"A little while and ye shall not see me; again, a little while and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father." It is your privilege now to think of father and mother, brothers and sisters as having already taken their seats with that great cloud of witnesses that look down upon us from the gallery of heaven. As with their eyes and the eyes of God upon you, run with patience the race that is set before you. It will soon be ended, and

* Both parents and four of their eight children.

then you will cross the narrow stream that now divides you, and go to join loved ones in heaven, and with them wear "a bright, immortal crown."

This church and congregation are again visited with affliction. It is no common bond of sympathy that unites you to your minister. You have a special interest in every event that affects him. You know that his discreet and amiable wife has contributed much to his happiness and usefulness. You have loved her much, both on account of her personal worth, and because she was the wife of your beloved pastor. And now that she is dead, you mourn your own loss, and deeply sympathize with him who is again made desolate. I need not enjoin it upon you to remember him, who, for many years, has been devoted to your highest interests, and has tenderly sympathized with you in all the changing scenes of life. You will, I doubt not, often in your prayers make mention of him and his motherless ones. You will be forward in tokens of sympathy and love, to assuage his grief and cheer his heart, and cause your pastor to say—"I dwell among mine own people." And may God sanctify this affliction to you and to him for your common benefit.

By our subject, and by the scenes in which we now mingle, we are all admonished to set our affections on things above. It is but "a little while" that we are to continue here; but in the future state we shall remain a great while. That is a world without end. Shall we then be absorbed with the things that pertain to the fleeting moments of time, and have no thought about eternity? Shall it

be our great aim to enjoy ourselves here a *little while*, and make no provision for our future happiness? Shall we do this, especially, when this "*little while*" is given us on purpose to secure a treasure in the heavens that faileth not?

Our friends who have died in the Lord, renounced the world as their chief good, denied themselves, took up their cross and followed Christ. This we all must do, if we would be prepared to die the death of the righteous. He who came to seek and to save us, calls upon us to leave the world and come unto Him. He hath said—"Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." O, hearken to his voice. Forsake the shadows of earth; and make Christ your friend. He is precious unto them that believe—their life, their joy, their hope. He speaks peace to their troubled spirits, gives them the victory over the last enemy, and opens to them the portals of heaven. O, forsake all and embrace Christ! Such will be your experience of his love, of the power and riches of his grace; so transcendently excellent and glorious will he appear; that you will say from your inmost soul—"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

“ Oh for the death of those
 Who slumber in the Lord !
 Oh be like theirs my last repose,
 Like theirs my last reward.

Their bodies, in the ground,
 In silent hope may lie,
 Till the last trumpet's joyful sound
 Shall call them to the sky.

Their ransomed spirits soar,
 On wings of faith and love,
 To meet the Saviour they adore,
 And reign with him above.

With us their names shall live
 Through long succeeding years,
 Embalmed with all our hearts can give,
 Our praises and our tears.

Oh for the death of those
 Who slumber in the Lord !
 Oh be like theirs my last repose,
 Like theirs my last reward.”



